TAHIRIH JUSTICE CENTER®

Promoting Justice for Women & Girls Worldwide

SUMMER-FALL 2005

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touching lives

Asylum for a Courageous Family Fleeing Forced Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation is Featured by Voice of America

A mother fighting to protect her daughters from mutilation and rape found refuge in the United States thanks to her incredible courage and the efforts of the Tahirih Justice Center (Tahirih). Fanta* fled Guinea with her daughters in 2002 with threats on her life still ringing in her ears. She bears deep-seated scars from her experience but wept tears of joy as the US immigration judge granted her asylum. Voice of America followed her case through the court system and aired a one-hour television program "Special Report Africa," detailing her story on February 9, 2005.

As a young woman, Fanta was abused and scarred by the infliction of genital cutting. This painful ritual, which involves cutting a woman's genitals so that she feels no pleasure during intercourse, was required before she could be married. After enduring this mutilation, Fanta was forced by her family to marry an already-married, older man. With no other options available, Fanta finally found a measure of peace in raising her two daughters.

But then her husband decided that the eldest daughter, Saran*, must endure the same genital cutting and be married. Fanta pleaded with him and managed to postpone the marriage until after Saran received a B.A. at college. But then she could not hold it off any longer. Her husband accepted a dowry from a man who already had three wives and demanded that their daughter consent to the marriage. He threatened to kill his wife if she interfered any further.

Saran, like her mother, tried to prevent the genital cutting ritual and forced wedding. Family members ruthlessly beat her for her opposition. Saran suffered a broken leg, a dislocated knee, and a deep head wound. When Fanta and Saran appealed to the authorities,

Names changed to protect privacy.

(continued on page 6)

HARD-FOUGHT VICTORY

Historic Lawsuit Won Against an International Marriage Broker

"When my husband started beating me and I turned to the [International Marriage Broker (IMB)] owner for help, she basically told me I needed to be a better wife….she told me if I tried to leave him I would be deported…in disgrace or worse, that I would have to leave my baby behind."

This emotional testimony comes from Nataliya Fox, a young woman who courageously went public with her painful ordeal. With the help of the Tahirih Justice Center and attorneys from the law firm of Arnold and Porter LLP, she won a Federal District Court landmark ruling in November 2004. This ruling held the IMB liable for failing to tell her about her right to escape this abusive marriage and for actively misleading her about her options. The broker lied about screening its male clients and about her potential husband and it advertised Nataliya's marriage as a "success" without her permission.

After a particularly brutal beating while Nataliya breastfed their three-week-old little girl, she went to the hospital. In an emergency room, as nurses tended to the vicious wounds inflicted by her husband, Nataliya first learned about domestic violence shelters. With her baby

(continued on page 4)

a few words from

Layli Miller-Muro,
Tahirih Justice Center Executive Director

Dear Friends,

We have all been watching the news of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita over the last few weeks with horror. For a nation so consistently blessed with material wealth and government services, the intolerable conditions of our brothers and sisters in the Gulf seems inconceivable. We are experiencing, as a nation, what many countries throughout the world often face—internally displaced people whose lives have been forever damaged. This is the experience of the Tahirih Justice Center's clients—women who escaped their intolerable conditions and sought security in an unknown land. We now have a profound, new (if not still distant) understanding of their plight.

Your commitment to helping others facing injustice find a place to call home inspires the work of the Tahirih Justice Center and the work of so many on behalf of the Hurricanes' survivors. Thank you.

Warm regards,

TAHIRIH JUSTICE CENTER®

Promoting Justice for Women & Girls Worldwide

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* *Farida and Ruth are former clients of the Tahirih Justice Center*

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efforts on the inside

Above and Beyond

Tahirih is incredibly fortunate to have the dedicated and selfless support of our Board members. They are constantly sustaining our efforts through personal donations of money and time. We wanted to highlight two recent kind acts:

- In December 2004, Michael MacLeod diverted from a personal trip to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro (which we are happy to reported he successfully climbed) to stop in Nairobi and visit the American Embassy. Michael inquired about a long-stalled visa petition for the daughter of one of our T visa (trafficking) clients. Due to Michael's persistence and dedication, his contacts directly led to the visa finally being issued.
- In the Spring of 2005, Mojgan Sami, while traveling on business, went to the American Embassy in Accra, Ghana, to assist our client who had been separated from her children for five years. The children had been issued notice of their visas but received notification of their appointments too late to attend. This put them in jeopardy of never being able to leave for the United States. Due to Mojgan's dedicated and skillful advocacy, the children have now been reunited with their mother here in the United States.

New Staff Enhances Clients' Access to Social Services

Thanks to a generous grant from the William Randolph Hearst Foundation, clients at Tahirih are receiving enhanced services as they settle into new lives in America. Allison Medina began work as Tahirih's first social worker in July. Her expertise includes both case management, preparing clients for change, and trauma counseling. Allison has an M.S.W. from Boston University and has worked in the United States and in Africa. While Tahirih has always addressed clients' social and medical services needs, Allison's position enables us to pro-actively meet client needs. She will help families navigate their new lives and maintain their hope. Our legal staff can then stay focused on the critical legal process and clients can move beyond just day-to-day survival.

Bahá'í Service Fellows Help Tahirih Serve More Women

Tahirih recently welcomed two new Bahá'í Service Fellows who will be replacing outgoing Bahá'í Service Fellow, Rosita Najmi. Elham Simmons and Beatrice Kirkbright will be serving at Tahirih for the next year by supporting the Legal Team and its representation of women and girls fleeing human rights abuses. During their service, they are living with Bahá'í families in the area, and receive a small stipend and health insurance. Additionally, they are helping local Bahá'í communities conduct study classes, children's classes, and devotional gatherings. Tahirih is extremely grateful for the service of these women—without their devotion we would be unable to serve the large numbers of women who come to us for help.

pro bono profile

Lindsay Marshall
Perkins Coie

When I took on a case from Tahirih Justice Center, I was expecting to gain immigration experience and help Haddy gain permanent residency under Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). What I truly gained, however, was a lesson from Haddy about strength of character. Over the course of two years, I was impressed daily not only with her strength in dealing with her past abuse, but also her attitude about the future, her work ethic, her sense of humor, and her love for her children.

I was so inspired by Haddy's strength after my initial interview with her, and I really enjoyed getting to know her personally beyond what I had initially read about her background and struggle. Getting to know Haddy as a person motivated me to work on her case and put together a very strong VAWA petition on her behalf.

When I first started as an associate at Perkins Coie, I took on a VAWA case for a young Palestinian woman in Pennsylvania, referred to us by a friend of the firm. It was a challenging case, given the client's unique background and other immigration applications she had pending. I did not have any experience in the area of immigration but really enjoyed having my own case to work on as a new associate and working with the client directly.

I was interested in doing more of these types of cases, but I wanted to work with the support from a group like the Tahirih Justice Center. I did some research on local organizations and was especially impressed with Tahirih's focus of working on gender-based immigration issues. I liked the idea of working with an organization that had a clearly defined mission of helping women on a global level. Tahirih also seemed to be extremely enthusiastic, organized, and successful in their work.

Professionally, I think my experiences with Haddy and Tahirih have made me a better lawyer. I've gained important skills through working directly with a real person as a client—which can be hard to do in a law firm setting. I've also learned first hand to practice attention to detail and succinctly present facts to a deciding authority. Personally, I have felt the rewards of helping someone achieve a very important milestone in their life. I have also learned a great deal about our immigration laws and policy and how both impact the lives of women.

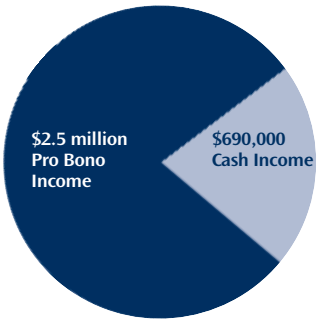
The most rewarding part, however, has been seeing the progress we have made from our initial interview two years ago to our application for permanent residency today. Since I first took on Haddy's case, she has been approved under VAWA, received employment authorization, separated from her abusive spouse and is living on her own with her two children. She even has an application for her legal permanent resident card pending. It has been wonderful to be part of this progress and to have been able to help her each step of the way.

Leveraging Revenue with Pro Bono Support

Tahirih's pro bono support from Washington-area law firms allows it to leverage revenue nearly four-times-over—**EFFECTIVELY TURNING EACH DOLLAR DONATED INTO ALMOST FOUR.** In 2004, 72% of Tahirih income came from donated professional services and slightly more than 28% from grants, corporations, and individuals.

Tahirih effectively uses pro bono attorneys and other professionals to maintain critical services. While monetary donations are vital to the provision of professional services and advocacy, the continued influx of new clients could quickly overwhelm existing staff. The commitment of attorney volunteers makes all the difference in our ability to keep women and girls safe from persecution.

2004 Pro Bono Support vs. Cash Income



Law Firms that are working on Tahirih Justice Center projects on a pro bono basis include:

Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP

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Historic Lawsuit Won Against an International Marriage Broker

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daughter, she finally escaped from the man that the IMB had told her was "the best of the best," "financially and mentally stable," and "serious about family." In fact, he had a history of domestic violence and his abuse only got worse after Nataliya became pregnant with their child.

Like most of the women that arrive each year to begin "mail order marriages," Ukrainian-born Nataliya spoke only limited English, knew little of US laws and customs, and had no friends here. Once her husband began beating her, she had no one to tell her what to do. No one, except for the IMB agency that brought her to this country and on which she relied for advice.

Over 500 US-based IMBs are in the business of connecting American men with foreign women. This industry has exploded within the last few years, expanding over the internet and through local affiliates. Like Nataliya, however, female clients have no opportunity to verify information provided by prospective husbands and the IMBs. Like Nataliya, they often find little or no support once they have arrived in the United States.

IMBs serve as an unregulated, bottomless source of prey for predatory abusers. While some successful marriages undoubtedly result from IMBs, it has become increasingly clear that most IMBs market women as docile and powerless to predatory male clients. They willfully ignore violent histories and pander to abusers.

Current estimates show that IMBs are responsible for between 12,000 and 14,000 women entering the United States each year. So the legal victory for Nataliya is also a victory for other women, lured to America with promises of good, decent husbands, only to find physical and mental abuse.

This case, *Fox v. Encounters International (D. Md. 02-1563),* marks the first time that:

- An IMB has been held accountable for violating its current obligations under federal law, which requires informing female clients of their rights to legal protection when fleeing domestic violence.
- An IMB has been held liable for failing to screen its male clients for a violent or criminal history after claiming to do so. While there is no current legal requirement to screen male clients [see "Legislation Needed," below], Nataliya had reasonably relied on the IMB's assertion that it had screened her potential husband.
- An IMB has been found liable for using, without permission, a client's name and photograph and for falsifying her story to promote its business. The company used Nataliya's story as a "success" even after she and her daughter fled to a domestic violence shelter and her husband filed for divorce.

What it takes to win a gender-based asylum case may surprise you. A typical case looks like this:

- 250 legal staff hours
- Over 50 client phone calls and meetings
- Three court hearings

Gender-based claims for asylum are complicated and time-intensive. And the stakes are always high. If forced to return to their native countries, our clients face certain violence and in many cases death. Yet Tahirih continues to win 98% of our cases and has never had a client deported.

This success takes resources. On average, to provide justice for one woman or girl costs $4,000. **Four thousand dollars to save a woman or girl's life.** When put in that context, it seems like a bargain.

YOU can help save a life today. Become a LifeSaver. Or become a partial LifeSaver—at whatever level you can afford. Our clients, some of the most vulnerable and victimized among us, rely on Tahirih. And we rely on support from you.

For more information on our LifeSaver Campaign, please contact Allyn Summa, Director of Development and Communications at 703-575-0070 or allyn@tahirih.org.

Save a Life Today!

LIFESAVER	$4,000
CHAMPION	$2,500
ADVOCATE	$1,500
PARTNER	$500
ALLY	$250
FRIEND	$100

CALLING ALL ATTORNEYS!

We are looking for attorneys willing to give their time and energy to help women and girls in need. Recently **WE EXPERIENCED A 400% INCREASE IN WEEKLY CALLS FOR HELP,** which is straining our ability to provide services. Our pro bono attorneys are more critical than ever in saving lives.

To keep our potential and current pro-bono partners updated, we provide a regular E-LERT. This emailed newsletter contains explanations of available cases, as well as updates on related legal issues. Attorneys respond to the E-LERT, requesting a case of particular interest. Once a pro bono attorney takes a case, he or she is assigned a Tahirih staff attorney as mentor. This Tahirih attorney assists the pro bono attorney throughout the case, providing documentation, training, and support.

PARTICIPATING IN OUR PRO BONO PROGRAM OFFERS YOU AN OPPORTUNITY TO TRANSFORM A WOMAN OR GIRL'S LIFE. Even if you are not ready today to take on a case, please consider signing up to receive E-LERT. Contact Rená Cutlip, Staff Attorney, at 703-575-0070 or rena@tahirih.org to join or to request further information.

gress in brief

Legislation Needed

To keep other IMB's from trapping unsuspecting women and their children in abusive relationships, bipartisan legislation to help protect "mail order brides" is now moving through Congress. The International Marriage Broker Regulation Act is a narrowly tailored, self-help approach to regulating the business of importing foreign brides for American husbands.

The Act enables women to make more informed choices to protect themselves and their children. Spurred in part by recent murders of young, foreign brides by their husbands, the legislation prevents predatory abusers from using complacent marriage brokers to find their next victims.

Specifically, the Act:

- Requires IMBs to collect the marital and criminal histories of prospective husbands.
- Requires IMBs to provide female clients, before their names are released to prospective husbands, with advise on their rights in relation to domestic violence and to obtain their written consent to the release of their information.
- Requires IMBs to advise the prospective husband that he will be subject to a criminal background check and to provide the female client with a copy of the background information collected.
- Requires that background checks, run on American men applying for visas for fiancées, be shared with propective wives during their interviews at the US consulate.
- Requires US consular officers to provide information on legal rights regarding domestic violence and resources for protection in the United States.
- Prevents Americans from seeking visas for multiple fiancées, allowing only one such application per year.
- Prohibits IMBs from profiling girls under the age of 18 as prospective spouses.

Essentially the Act requires IMBs, who earn high fees for their services, to responsibly conduct their business with both spouses. For thousands of women in America, this change could keep them out of the emergency rooms and their children in safe homes.

LET YOUR CONGRESSMAN AND SENATOR KNOW TODAY THAT YOU SUPPORT THIS VITAL LEGISLATION! THE INTERNATIONAL MARRIAGE BROKER REGULATION ACT OF 2005 will be introduced by Senators Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and Sam Brownback (R-KS) and Representatives Rick Larsen (D-WA) and Frank Wolf (R-VA). For more information, contact Jeanne Smoot, Public Policy Counsel, at 703-575-0070 or jeanne@tahirih.org.

"[Russian women] are much more patient and can tolerate things that Western women will never be able to bear...Russian women have very low self-esteem...a Russian woman will rarely leave a bad (really BAD) husband because of the fear that she won't find another one. For many years the state and men have been oppressing them, and they don't think much about themselves."

—*Russian Brides Cyber Guide,* (last visited July 29, 2004)

"Our lovely and sexy...Asians are selected for their loyalty and zero tolerance for divorce, et al. My subservient ladies will serve your needs as a traditional wife, girlfriend or even a causal [sic] friend with whom you can exchange videos and photos."

—*Submissives,* (last visited July 29, 2004)

speaking out

The Tahirih Justice Center and its staff are internationally recognized for their efforts in public policy, advocacy, and human rights. Speaking engagements allow Tahirih to advocate for national and international policy changes. Tahirih staff have been involved in a variety of outreach activities this year, participating as award recipients, trainers, and conference speakers. Here are some examples:

- Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP
- Alexandria Inova Hospital
- Arnold & Porter LLP
- American University
- American University Law School
- Arlington Asylum Office
- Cross-Cultural Perspectives in Domestic Violence
- Crowell & Moring
- Domestic Violence Resource Program
- Fairfax County Police
- Fairfax County Victims/Witness' Specialists
- George Mason University
- Georgetown Law School
- Georgetown University
- Global Young Leaders Conference
- Hogan & Hartson LLP
- Karamah
- Legal Services of Northern Virginia
- Madeira High School
- Public Leadership Education Network
- School Without Walls
- Trinity University
- Tufts University
- VAWA Area Network Workshop
- Victim Assistance Network
- Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Door LLP
- Young Professional Business Ethics Forum

Asylum for a Courageous Family

(continued from page 1)

police said this was a "family problem" and berated them for going against custom.

Fanta would not step aside, however, and courageously chose instead to act. She did not want her daughter to endure the same suffering that she did. Threats on Fanta's own life were becoming more dangerous every day. Taking a last desperate chance, Fanta sold all her personal possessions and fled with her three daughters to the United States.

Once in the United States, staff and volunteers at the Tahirih Justice Center worked with Fanta to prepare an asylum application. For over two years, the case dragged through the courts with frustrating delays. Fanta and her daughters could not be sure they would not be deported to Guinea and the dangers that awaited them. Summer intern Lauren Celello prepared a stellar brief, under the supervision of Staff Attorney Melysa Sperber, and Managing Attorney Colleen Renk Zengotitabengoa provided the finest advocacy skills. Finally, on July 14, 2005, they arrived for the final immigration hearing in Baltimore.

Notwithstanding her maternity leave and with baby in tow, Colleen was determined to finish the appeal herself. And with a brief statement from the judge, the case was won: Fanta and her daughters were granted asylum in the United States. Amidst her tears, Fanta expressed her deep gratitude to everyone at Tahirih. On her behalf, to our supporters who made this possible, Thank You!

About Guinea

- Guinea is one of the poorest countries in the world. Warfare and internal strife have left the country decimated. International funds were cut in 2001, drastically hurting the struggling economy and public sector. [Source: UN Reports]
- The literacy rate for females is just 24%, compared to 54% for males. Women have a 1 in 13 risk of dying in child birth. [Source: UN Reports]
- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a widespread practice among certain ethnic groups in Guinea. Infibulation, the most severe form of FGM, has reportedly been performed not only on adolescents but on infants and babies. [Source: AFROL]

Tahirih's Executive Director Honored

Layli Miller-Muro, Tahirih's Executive Director, received the District of Columbia Bar Association's **YOUNG LAWYER OF THE YEAR AWARD** as well as the **SOROPTOMIST MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR WOMEN AWARD.** Congratulations, Layli!

for the record

Clients of Tahirih, their struggles and some of the work being done to assist them, have been highlighted in press reports.

- Daren Briscoe, *Newsweek,* "Mail-Order Misery: Charging abuse, imported brides are fighting back," January 29, 2005.
- Center for American Progress, "So-Called 'Anti-Terrorism' Measures Harm Battered Immigrant Women," November 5, 2004.
- Michelle Chen, "Slavery Slips Through Cracks in US Policy," *The NewsStandard,* July 5, 2005.
- Cindy Gonzalez, "Matchmaking Booms with Help of Internet," July 24, 2005; "First Comes Marriage Broker," July 25, 2005, *Omaha World-Herald.*
- Stephanie Hanes, "Mail-Order Bride Wins Damage Award," *BaltimoreSun.com,* November 19, 2004.
- Jane. O. Hansen, "From Russia, for Love," December 5, 2004; "A Stalking, A Shooting, and a Surprise Ending," December 5, 2004; "Mail-order bride business is popular, controversial," December 8, 2004, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution.*
- Tara McKelvey, "Of Human Bondage," *American Prospect Magazine,* November 1, 2004.
- Eric Rich, "Battered Wife Wins Suit Against Maryland Matchmaker," *Washington Post,* November 19, 2004. (run through the Associated Press)

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Zafor Iqbal
Jennifer Noisette
Aminatou Poubelle
Simonetta Rodriguez
Dorothy Rudzik
Meredith Sisa
Rainie Summa
Tiffany Venuto

Although every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of this listing, we may overlook someone. If this is the case, please accept our apology and notify us immediately.

YOU can help save a life today. Become a LifeSaver. Or become a partial LifeSaver—at whatever level you can afford. Our clients, some of the most vulnerable and victimized among us, rely on Tahirih. And we rely on support from you. To learn more, please read the LifeSaver box on page 4 or visit www.tahirih.org today.

learn more at www.tahirih.org

# of note

IN THE NEWS

Tahirih staff have appeared in the following media outlets:

ABC News
ABCNews.com
American Progress
Associated Press
BBC
Baltimore Sun
CBSNews.com
CNN.com
Fox News
Free Speech Radio News
Ladies Home Journal
Legal Affairs Magazine
The (London) Observer
London Telegraph
Moscow Times
National Public Radio
NBC Nightly News
NewYorkTimes.com
Newsweek
Philadelphia Inquirer
San Antonio Express-News
The Seattle Times
Stanford Daily
Voice of America
The Washington Post
XM Radio

LOCAL SUPPORT

Van Scoyoc Associates, Inc. Event Features Congressman Moran's Support

Congressman Jim Moran (D-VA) and host Buzz Hawley (Van Scoyoc Associates, Inc.)

On July 12, Van Scoyoc Associates, Inc. generously hosted an event for the legal and corporate community to learn more about the work of the Tahirih Justice Center. The event was attended by Representative Moran (D-VA), a leading advocate for the rights of women and immigrants in the Northern Virginia area. We were honored to have Representative Moran movingly speak to the attendees regarding the historical figure of Tahirih and the pressing need to provide services to the courageous but vulnerable immigrant women and girls we serve. Ruth Sakwa, a former client and current Board member, spoke about the horrors that led her to flee Kenya to protect her daughter.

You Can Help!

Since our inception, Tahirih has been an organization fueled by an outpouring of support, in many forms, from concerned individuals throughout the world. Tahirih recognizes that every person can play a part in assuring that women and girls receive justice. Here are a few ways you can help:

- Donating pro bono medical services including psychiatric services, ophthalmology, dentistry, obstetrics and gynecology, and pediatrics;
- Donating pro bono legal services;
- Donating other professional services such as grant writing, copy writing, graphic design and layout, and fundraising;
- Donating new—or almost new—office equipment including computers, phone system, printers, copiers, and fax machines;
- Hosting clients while their claims are in the legal system and helping them with shopping and other basic needs;
- Providing transportation for clients to and from legal and social-service appointments;
- Providing childcare during office hours for our clients' children during office appointments; and
- Hosting fundraising events and speaking engagements.

We welcome you to contact Allison Medina, Social Worker/Case Mmanager, 703-575-0070 or allison@tahirih.org to discuss ways you can help the Tahirih Justice Center promote justice for women and girls worldwide.

TAHIRIH JUSTICE CENTER®
Promoting Justice for Women & Girls Worldwide
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